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SALT ratification: Looking for a spy

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WASHINGTON — Domestic political concerns in Ankara and Moscow could significantly affect the ratification prospects of the SALT II treaty.

Carter Administration officials privately say the toughest single issue standing in the path of the controversial agreement is widespread apprehension among senatorial fence-sitters as to whether the treaty can be verified in the face of the loss of two key intelligence stations in Iran.

"A lot of senators, like John Glenn (D-Ohio), would like to be with us on SALT," an Administration official notes, "but they plain don't trust the Russians as far as they can spit. They want to be sure we have the unquestionable ability to prevent cheating."

The American intelligence community has come up with five options, short and long run, aimed at compensating for the loss of the Iranian listening posts: flying two specially equipped U-2s along the Turkish-Soviet border near the big Russian missile test center at Tyuratam; modifying the operational Chalet satellite so it can alert the U-2s and other systems as to imminent tests at Tyuratam; upgrading the capabilities of a radio intercept station in Norway; developing a very capable new electronic intelligence satellite to begin operations in 1983 or 1984; and mounting a hush-hush covert operation to fill some data gaps.

The U-2 proposal has the quickest potential payoff and thus has been the main focus of Senate interest.

The first 60 seconds of missile flight represent a critical period. Radio telemetry intercepted during this boost phase can tell weapons analysts how much thrust and payload the ICBM has, the number of warheads it carries and whether it can accurately dispense more warheads than are actually released on any particular flight.

One important SALT II provision limits to 10 the number of warheads on any ICBM. The main target here is the giant Soviet SS-18 which has been tested with at least 12 warheads and theoretically could carry as many as 30 or 40. But if the new US mobile MX missile deployment scheme is to be safe from surprise attack, the total number of Russian warheads must be kept down.

Another major SALT clause restricts each side to one new ICBM through 1985 and holds that existing land-based mis-

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cent without being classed as "new." Since the Soviets are believed to be developing as many as five new missiles, this provision also is viewed as important.

Only through careful monitoring can such constraints be policed.

One might think it a simple matter for Turkey, a member of NATO which already permits US monitoring stations on its soil, to routinely OK the U-2 flights. The purpose, after all, is to enforce an arms-control agreement that both the US and the USSR insist is in the interest of world peace and stability.

But Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit is fighting for his political life. His economy is in tatters. Political violence rages across his campuses. Defections in his party put his parliamentary majority in dire question. The recent House of Representatives rejection of treating \$50 million in military aid as a grant raised anew doubts about the American connection.

In that environment Ecevit feels he cannot risk making the Russians so angry about new "spy" flights — even through his own air space — that they might retaliate by cutting back on vital aid and trade. So he asked Washington to get assurances from Moscow that it would not retaliate for U-2 flights.

President Jimmy Carter tried that at Vienna with Leonid Brezhnev, but failed. The aging Soviet leader had been told in advance the issue would be raised and assent would go a long way toward relaxing Senate suspicions, thus improving the uncertain ratification prospects of SALT. Still he refused.

This has prompted some American analysts to ponder whether Brezhnev's health is so bad and his clout so diminished that he wouldn't risk antagonizing hard-line Politburo colleagues.

The Administration hasn't given up. Now the Turkish parliament has gone on recess, Ecevit has about three months before facing another challenge from the opposition. If Moscow can be persuaded to go along, the hope is that U-2 flights can be OK'd and announced by fall.

For ratification of SALT is not only important to Carter's foreign policy, but to his own flagging political fortunes as well.

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